

TESTIMONY OF  
WILLIAM O. HOWLAND, JR  
ON HIS CONFIRMATION AS  
DIRECTOR OF THE  
DC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2004

Good morning, Chairperson Schwartz and members of the Committee on Public Works and the Environment. My name is William Otis Howland, Jr., and I am pleased to be here today to present my credentials for the position of permanent Director of the District's Department of Public Works.

I have over 20 years of local government experience in management and public policy. For the past six months, I have been serving as the Interim and Acting Director for the Department of Public Works, succeeding Leslie Hotaling.

As you know, I came to the District of Columbia Government in 2001, after a 17-year career with Fairfax County.

That experience includes five years as the Director of the Department of Administration for Human Services an agency of 200 employees. Some of the duties of the position included the management of human resources (3,000 employees), fiscal administration (\$340 million), procurement, general services and information technology for all of human services.

The major challenge of that organization was consolidating nine human services agency into one new administrative agency. I was responsible for setting the direction and the tone for how the new organization would serve its customers. While in Fairfax County, I also served as the Assistant to the County Executive for six years. I managed special projects as directed by the County Executive. Specifically, I directed a team on a collaborative effort to review the County's procurement process. Ultimately, we were able to improve service delivery by streamlining the process.

Mayor Williams brought me on to be the Deputy Director for the D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS), an agency of 1100 employees. I managed the capital budget for DHS and led a team of eight departments to create an emergency management plan to shelter displaced residents and reunify families.

Prior to my appointment to DPW, I served nearly two years as Chief of Staff for Deputy Mayor of Operations, Herbert R. Tillery. Some of my accomplishments include initiating the review of temporary tags that ultimately led to the moratorium on temp tags, and reducing the District government's fleet size.

Since mid-April, when I became Interim Director, DPW has been busier than ever keeping the city clean and working to eradicate the conditions that contribute to blight and crime. Let me mention just a few of these operations.

- DPW is an integral partner working with other agencies in cleaning designated Hot Spots. Our SWEEP inspectors have been on the forefront of this day-to-day effort, along with crews from Street and Alley Cleaning, Bulk Trash Collection and Abandoned Vehicle Operations.

- Obviously, not all abandoned autos are located in Hot Spots. By conducting intensive sweeps citywide, we have reduced the backlog of abandoned vehicles from about 1100 to fewer than 400.
- Another major achievement has been the consolidation of our vehicle impoundment operations. We have vacated the short-term lot at Addison Road in Maryland and integrated it into the Blue Plains Impoundment and Storage Facility in DC, without increasing the footprint at Blue Plains. The move will save the District government \$1 million per year in lease costs.
- DPW has also successfully implemented the Centralized Towing System and created an on-line Towed Vehicle Locator. Launching this program has been a collaborative effort with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the Office of the Chief Technology Officer and the Metropolitan Police Department.

I should also note that Centralized Towing could not have become a reality without the support of this committee.

As I mentioned earlier, I am succeeding Leslie Hotaling. For a woman of such small stature, she has awfully big shoes to fill. I am determined to build on her significant legacy, and lead this Department to even higher levels of service.

My assessment of the department is that it is already in very good shape. That is a direct result of having a strong, dedicated workforce and a talented management team that are committed to serving the public.

In my discussions with many of you over the past couple of weeks, I have been gratified that there have been very few complaints about the quality of DPW's service. Of course, we aspire to do better: to improve weak areas and sustain our strongest operations.

DPW's primary mission is to keep DC clean and attractive in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. My goal is seeing that we all perform with excellence in every facet of our mission. We accomplish this by delivering consistent, scheduled services; by exploring cost-effective ways to provide our services; and by adapting to changing times to meet the community needs.

My 20 years in public service has taught me that it is easy for government agencies to become complacent. After all, when you're the only game in town, so to speak, why push for better performance? Why try to be Hertz when being Avis is good enough? Avis knows it has work harder to be Number 1. I want to instill in our employees that sense of motivation and drive, as if we are competing to provide services to our customers. My goal is attaining a level of customer satisfaction that this agency has never seen before. We can achieve that by listening to what our customers tell us and by asking our employees how to deliver on those demands.

I have learned that often times the folks doing the job know best how to improve service delivery. I've spent many hours over the last six months visiting our employees in the workplace – experiencing their challenges and asking them questions. Even before that, as I got to know DPW operations, I went to the snow summit, learned how to drive a snow plow and even competed in the DPW/DDOT Rodeo (where I took first place in the light plow competition, I might add). I firmly believe that to lead an organization, you have to know an organization.

However, keeping this city clean is not only the responsibility of DPW; it is also the job of all its residents and businesses. DPW needs to reach out and help the community Keep DC Clean. Although the City is as clean as it has ever been, not everyone is participating. I will be calling upon staff to design a creative program that draws more people and businesses into being a part of a Clean DC.

There are several challenges that face the Department in this fiscal year and beyond. Probably our greatest and most exciting challenge will be bringing the recycling service back in-house. Beginning in February 2005, DPW will begin collecting recycling for its 110,000 residential customers using DPW crews and trucks. Thanks to this committee's support, Madam Chair, the trucks have been ordered, as well as the new recycling carts that have been so successful in the pilot program in Wards 7 and 6.

We are also gearing up to launch a new program in cooperation with the Department of Transportation. Later this month, DPW will be deploying well-trained Intersection Control Officers who will be directing traffic at over one dozen of the most congested downtown intersections. The aim of this program is easing gridlock during morning and evening rush hours. When not on intersection duty, these same employees will enforce parking regulations downtown, focusing particularly on those vehicles obstructing traffic by double-parking on the street.

At the moment we are processing the paperwork for the employees who have been hired and trained. They will go through a final preparation before they are placed in the intersections.

One of our more visible challenges is maintaining the cleanliness of the major gateways and thoroughfares. The VMS contract expires later this fiscal year. I will be seeking funding support from the Mayor and the Council to continue this effort. The cleanliness of the gateways is a visitor's first impression of our wonderful city and we want them to shine.

Ultimately, I am accountable for achieving all results. As a Ward 4 resident and homeowner, I have a vested interest in making this Department work. You have my commitment that DPW will continue to work with the Council, the residents and the business community as a team to Keep DC Clean.